

108 Mill Closure Tough Test For Manager

CARTHAGE — Without regrets, James A. Cadd will leave the Fort James Corp. paper mill in several weeks knowing he did the best he could for his workers.

"Life's not perfect and it's never going to be perfect," he said. "You'll never satisfy everyone's needs, but I will walk away thinking I did the best I could."

For six months as mill manager, Mr. Cadd prepared his 320 employees for the April 5 closing of the 100-year-old mill. With an open-door policy, he tried to address all concerns by offering support and career advice to each of the employees.

"There's no question this was the most difficult thing I've ever had to do," he said. "It was a learning experience, but not one I ever want to go through again."

Weldon G. Papineau, a 29-year mill employee, said Mr. Cadd was the best of the 10 managers he worked for. Mr. Cadd introduced himself to all the workers, remembered everyone's name and spent countless hours in the plant with them, Mr. Papineau said.

"We didn't consider him a mill manager; he's just like a normal person. Everyone liked him," he said.

Michael Dumaw, a 22-year mill worker, said Mr. Cadd was an "employee person" who sincerely cared about the workers.

"With what this man's been through in the past few months, I don't know how he's done it. We couldn't ask for a better boss," Mr. Dumaw said.

Before coming to Carthage in June 1996, Mr. Cadd managed several Crown Zellerbach and James River paper mills on the West Coast.

With nearly 30 years of experience in the paper industry, he thought last year's merger between James River and Fort Howard would enhance paper manufacturing capabilities in the Northeast.

He planned to be at the Carthage mill for about five years, he said, and never expected, or wanted, his time here to be shortened to less than two years.

"It's been a good run, but a little short," he said.

He said he was frustrated and disappointed with the company's decision to close the mill here because it has valuable assets, including an excellent work force.

"I think there were other options that could have been pursued," he said. "They (the corporation) did a lot, but not enough in the end be-

cause there are still people that don't have jobs."

He said the last month, and the final two operation days at the mill, were the toughest for him and the workers, who ran the machines for the last time.

"The end was the most difficult. You can't help to have empathy for those people," he said. "The people operating have lived with this equipment for years, and they ran it extremely well right to the end."

When discussion about closing the mill began in early fall, Mr. Cadd told employees of the possibility. He said he wanted them to be prepared emotionally and financially for the decision.

"It's harder to do that," he said. "It's a lot easier just to tell them when it happens, but that's not fair."

By preparing employees for the

announcement, and reminding them that they were still being paid, Mr. Cadd may have prevented emotional and safety problems.

"They knew it was going to close; they didn't like running it, but they did it," he said.

Under similar circumstances, companies often fear injuries, arguments and other problems will occur.

Only one minor injury occurred, in February, and none of the machines was damaged.

"I'm proud of the people's professional behavior in view of the situation; it says a lot about the people. They have a tremendous commitment to this place," he said.

Mr. Cadd isn't sure what he wants to do when he finishes his work at the mill in about two weeks. Fort James offered him retirement and relocation options.

He also has received offers from other businesses, he said. It is likely that he and his wife will move out of the area, although they have enjoyed the community, the weather and the recreation opportunities.

"We've had a wonderful time here," he said. "It's a great town to live in."

They may move back to the West Coast, where they own a house in Washington and a ranch in Oregon. At 55, he is not yet ready to settle into retirement, he said.

"I'm tired and stressed, but ready to go to work and do something else," he said.

Whether he stays here or moves to the West Coast, he said, he will always care about his Carthage employees.

"I have a lot of concern for these people and that will always be there," he said.

He said he had no idea it would result in the closure of the Carthage and Ashland, Wis., mills. The Ashland mill closed in February.

"It appeared to be a pretty good blend," he said. "Unfortunately, it had negative impacts on Carthage and Ashland."